
HEDGING AS DISCOURSE STRATEGY IN MARRIAGE AND LAND DISPUTE IN ANAMBRA STATE

By

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Abstract

The study examined the hedging as a discourse strategy in resolving conflicts, particularly in the contexts of marriage disputes and land disputes in Achina, Aguata Local Government Area, Anambra state. The main aim of this study is therefore, to examine these discourse strategy in resolving conflicts. The study made use of descriptive research design method. Structured questionnaire was used for data collection. 250 respondents were sampled in the study area. Mean rating was used for data analysis. The findings of the study showed that modal verbs and expressions of probability, conditional statements, indirect speech and reported speech, diplomatic and polite language and use of proverbs and metaphors are the types of hedging strategies used in managing land dispute discourse; hedging strategies have impact on conflict resolution in Achina, Aguata Local Government Area and that the cultural and socio-economic factors have influence on hedging strategies. The study concluded that hedging is a double-edged sword in dispute resolution, offering both advantages in conflict management and challenges in clarity. Its effective use requires a balance between maintaining flexibility and ensuring that issues are resolved in a timely and definitive manner. Based on the findings, the study suggested that to compare hedging strategies used in marriage disputes versus land disputes across different communities in Anambra State or other Nigerian states.

Keywords: Hedging, Discourse Strategy, Marriage, Land Dispute

Introduction

Land disputes have historically been a source of contention globally, often leading to conflicts that require structured management approaches. While land conflicts were primarily resolved through traditional mechanisms in the past, modern governance has introduced legal frameworks and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) methods. However, the future of land dispute management remains uncertain, given the evolving socio-political and environmental factors that may shape conflict resolution strategies.

Historically, land disputes were managed through customary practices and traditional leadership structures. In many pre-colonial African societies, land was communally owned, with elders or chiefs acting as arbiters in disputes (Okoth-Ogendo, 2019). However, with the advent of colonial rule and the introduction of formal land tenure systems, disputes increased as land became privatized and commoditized. This transition led to the marginalization of indigenous land tenure systems, creating persistent conflicts that still manifest today.

In the present era, legal frameworks and ADR mechanisms have gained prominence in land dispute management. Governments have established land tribunals, commissions, and courts to address land conflicts through statutory laws. Legal reforms have played a crucial role in formalizing land rights and reducing disputes. However, legal adjudication is often criticized for being time-consuming, expensive, and inaccessible

to marginalized groups. ADR mechanisms, such as mediation and arbitration, have emerged as viable alternatives to litigation (Ubink, 2018). These methods emphasize negotiation and reconciliation, thereby fostering peaceful co-existence among disputing parties. Nonetheless, ADR effectiveness depends on factors such as cultural acceptance, institutional support, and power dynamics among stakeholders.

Predicting the future of land dispute management remains complex due to various uncertainties. While legal frameworks and ADR methods are likely to continue playing significant roles, emerging trends such as climate change, urbanization, and technological advancements could reshape conflict resolution approaches (Deininger & Feder, 2019). It is possible that digital land registries and blockchain technology will enhance transparency and reduce disputes related to land ownership. However, it is also conceivable that technological disparities and governance inefficiencies could pose challenges to equitable access to land justice.

Moreover, land reform policies may undergo significant transformations as governments and international organizations seek sustainable solutions to land tenure security. Although policy interventions are expected to enhance dispute resolution mechanisms, the socio-political landscape may introduce unpredictability in land governance (Boone, 2024). Land disputes remain a critical challenge across various regions, necessitating dynamic and context-specific management approaches. While historical

mechanisms relied on traditional arbitration, modern frameworks emphasize legal adjudication and ADR. The future of land dispute resolution is uncertain but likely to be influenced by technological advancements, policy shifts, and socio-political changes. Further research is needed to explore innovative strategies for managing land conflicts effectively in an evolving global landscape. The land reform policies may undergo significant transformations as governments and international organizations seek sustainable solutions to land tenure security. Although policy interventions are expected to enhance dispute resolution mechanisms, the socio-political landscape may introduce unpredictability in land governance (Boone, 2024).

In interpersonal conflicts, language serves as a medium through which individuals express emotions, assert needs, and clarify misunderstandings. The way language is used in these situations significantly impacts the outcome of the conflict. For instance, using "I" statements ("I feel...") rather than accusatory "You" statements ("You always...") can soften the tone of a discussion and reduce defensiveness, fostering a more constructive conversation (Gordon, 2003). This strategy encourages individuals to focus on their own feelings and needs rather than placing blame on the other person, thus facilitating a resolution.

Moreover, the use of discourse strategies such as hedging where speakers use less assertive language to express uncertainty can prevent escalation and promote dialogue.

Hedging helps soften the delivery of critical or controversial statements, making it easier for the other party to respond without feeling attacked. This approach can be particularly useful in emotionally charged conflicts, such as those in romantic relationships or close friendships, where maintaining the relationship is a priority (Holmes, 1984). Hedging is a key discourse strategy employed in sensitive situations. In both marriage and land disputes, hedging allows speakers to soften their stance, navigate conflicts, and manage relationships. This seminar explores the concept of hedging as a discourse strategy, focusing on its use in marriage and land disputes, two contexts where emotions, stakes, and social dynamics are critical.

Land disputes remain a critical challenge across various regions, necessitating dynamic and context-specific management approaches. While historical mechanisms relied on traditional arbitration, modern frameworks emphasize legal adjudication and ADR. The future of land dispute resolution is uncertain but likely to be influenced by technological advancements, policy shifts, and socio-political changes. Further research is needed to explore innovative strategies for managing land conflicts effectively in an evolving global landscape.

Statement of the Problem

In every society, language serves as a crucial tool for negotiation, conflict resolution, and social interaction. Hedging, as a linguistic strategy, plays a significant role in softening

assertions, avoiding direct confrontation, and maintaining relationships during sensitive discussions. In Anambra State, marriage and land disputes are prevalent and often marked by emotionally charged exchanges. These disputes are deeply rooted in cultural, economic, and familial contexts, making communication during such conflicts critical (Gordon, 2003).

Marriage disputes frequently involve sensitive topics such as infidelity, financial disagreements, and family interference, where the use of hedging can reduce tension and facilitate understanding. Similarly, land disputes, which are often tied to ownership, inheritance, and traditional rights, require careful communication to navigate the complexities of customary practices and modern legal frameworks (Wodak, 1996). Despite the apparent importance of linguistic strategies, there has been limited scholarly attention on how hedging is employed as a discourse strategy in these contexts in Anambra State.

The problems, therefore, are inadequate understanding of conflict communication which as a result the lack of systematic study on hedging strategies in marriage and land disputes leaves a void in understanding how individuals use language to navigate sensitive issues without escalating tensions. Cultural context neglect is a serious issue which hedging often fail to account for the unique sociocultural dynamics of Anambra State, where traditions and modernity coexist and influencing communication patterns. Ineffective conflict resolution practices that

is without insights into effective discourse strategies, mediators, family heads, and community leaders may struggle to resolve disputes amicably, potentially leading to prolonged conflicts or fractured relationships. Another problem is the overlooked role of gender and power dynamics which influence gender roles and power relations which leads to use of hedging during disputes is underexplored, limiting the understanding of how these factors shape conflict resolution processes.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the use of hedging as a discourse strategy in resolving conflicts, particularly in the contexts of marriage disputes and land disputes in Achina, Anambra state. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Identify the type of hedging strategies used in managing marriage and land dispute discourse in Achina, Anambra state.
2. Examine the impact of hedging strategies on conflict resolution in Achina, Anambra state.
3. Examine the cultural and socio-economic factors influencing hedging strategies in Achina, Anambra state.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study

1. What are the types of hedging strategies used in managing marriage

and land dispute discourse in Achina, Anambra state?

2. What are the impact of hedging strategies on conflict resolution in Achina, Anambra state?
3. What are the cultural and socio-economic factors influencing hedging strategies in Achina, Anambra state?

Significance of the Study

This study is carried out to expose some hedging strategies used in managing land dispute discourse. The cultural and socio-economic factors influencing hedging strategies and its conflict resolution.

Researchers will benefit from the research in that it will enlighten them on the impact of hedging strategies on conflict resolution in writing. It will also educate them on the importance of impact of hedging strategies in managing conflict.

The public, especially the rural dwellers will benefit immensely from the study as it will provide them with the basic knowledge of hedging strategies in managing land disputes. It will also enlighten them on the benefits of cultural and socio-economic factors.

Researchers will find the study very useful, especially as it will provide them with information on hedging strategies. It will also serve as a reference material to those who are carrying out a study on this topic or any related one.

Scope of Study

This research study is limited to the use of hedging as a discourse strategy in resolving conflicts, particularly in the contexts of marriage disputes and land disputes in Achina, Aguata Local Government of Anambra State respectively. Achina town is choosing for the study because Achina is known for its deep-rooted traditional customs and indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms. The town places strong emphasis on verbal negotiation, diplomacy, and communal arbitration, making it an ideal setting for studying how hedging strategies are employed in conflict discourse.

Theoretical Framework

Politeness Theory

Politeness Theory was proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987). This theory provides a useful framework for understanding why individuals use hedging in communication, particularly in situations involving potential conflict, sensitive topics, or power dynamics. Politeness Theory revolves around the idea of "face," which refers to a person's public self-image and the desire to maintain a positive image during interactions. According to the theory, there are two types of face that individuals seek to protect:

- **Positive Face:** The desire to be liked, appreciated, and approved by others.
- **Negative Face:** The desire to be autonomous, free from imposition, and not constrained by others.

In communication, people engage in strategies to maintain their own face and that of their interlocutors. These strategies are particularly important when the conversation involves "face-threatening acts" (FTAs), which can challenge either the positive or negative face of the participants. Hedging is one of the strategies used to mitigate these FTAs. Hedging softens the impact of statements that could threaten someone's face. For instance, when making a request or criticism, hedging allows the speaker to reduce the force of their words, making the interaction less direct and less confrontational. E.g. In a marriage dispute, instead of saying, "You never help with the housework," a hedged statement like "I think maybe you could help more with the housework, sometimes?" is less threatening to the partner's negative face. In both personal and formal disputes, hedging helps to preserve social relationships by ensuring that communication remains respectful and less aggressive. This is critical in disputes where relationships need to be maintained, such as in marriage or community land disputes. In situations where there is a power imbalance, such as in legal disputes or hierarchical relationships, hedging helps less powerful individuals express their concerns or objections without directly challenging the authority of the other party.

Relevance of politeness theory to marriage and land disputes is that in marriage disputes, where emotions and relationship dynamics play a significant role, hedging helps protect the positive face of both partners. It allows individuals to express concerns in a way that

reduces the emotional burden on the listener, promoting a more collaborative and less adversarial approach to conflict resolution. In land disputes, particularly those involving family or community members, hedging mitigates negative face-threatening acts by allowing parties to present claims or counterclaims without escalating tensions. It fosters a negotiation environment where stakeholders can navigate complex social and legal dynamics without causing irreparable harm to relationships. Politeness Theory provides a strong theoretical basis for understanding hedging as a discourse strategy, especially in conflict resolution. By analyzing how people use hedging to manage face-threatening acts, preserve relationships, and navigate power dynamics, we can better understand its role in both personal and formal disputes, such as those in marriage and land issues.

Review of Relevant Scholarship

Conceptual Review

Hedging

Hedging refers to the use of vague or non-committal language to soften the impact of a statement, express uncertainty, or reduce the potential threat to the listener's face. Brown and Levinson (1987) describe hedging as part of their theory of politeness, where speakers use indirect language to mitigate face-threatening acts and maintain social harmony. According to Lakoff (1973:13), hedging involves the introduction of fuzziness or uncertainty in statements to avoid committing fully to a proposition. This

strategy allows the speaker to remain flexible in their stance and reduce the risk of being wrong or facing confrontation.

Pragmatically, hedging is understood as a way to express cautiousness or tentativeness in communication. Holmes (1984) argues that hedging allows speakers to soften claims, make suggestions less assertive, and provide an open space for negotiation in discourse. It is often used to navigate conversations without creating conflict. Meyer (1997) defines hedging as a discourse strategy where speakers qualify their statements to express uncertainty, politeness, or mitigate the impact of potentially confrontational or definitive statements. This strategy is frequently used in academic and legal settings, where precision and caution in language are necessary.

In the context of conflict resolution, hedging is used to reduce the directness of language, thereby making conversations less adversarial and more cooperative. According to Tannen (1993), hedging can serve as a way to manage power dynamics and avoid escalation during negotiations by framing statements in a less confrontational manner. Hedging refers to the use of linguistic devices to soften statements, express uncertainty, or reduce the impact of potentially confrontational or direct speech. It involves the use of words or phrases that make statements less forceful or assertive, thereby mitigating the risk of conflict or offense. Common hedging devices include:

- Modal verbs (e.g., "might," "could," "may")

- Qualifiers (e.g., "somewhat," "perhaps," "possibly")
- Indirect language (e.g., "I think," "It seems")
- Euphemisms or vague expressions

Hedging is a strategic tool that people use to avoid making absolute claims or offending their interlocutors in delicate situations.

Marriage Disputes

In the context of marriage disputes, hedging is commonly used as a discourse strategy to manage sensitive conversations, reduce the intensity of conflicts, and maintain the emotional balance between partners. Since marital relationships are built on emotional intimacy and mutual dependency, direct confrontation or aggressive communication can lead to heightened tensions. As a result, hedging allows individuals to express grievances or concerns in a less confrontational manner, mitigating the risk of escalation. Hedging helps soften potentially harsh or critical statements by introducing uncertainty or politeness into the conversation. Holmes (1995) argues that in personal relationships, such as marriage, hedging is frequently employed to protect the other person's face and to prevent conflict from becoming overly confrontational. By reducing the perceived threat in communication, spouses are able to discuss issues more openly while minimizing emotional distress.

In marriage disputes, maintaining the relationship often takes priority over

"winning" an argument. Tannen (1990) notes that conversational strategies like hedging help partners navigate power dynamics without overtly challenging one another, thus preserving relational harmony. By using hedging, partners can express dissatisfaction or ask for changes without making their spouse feel defensive or attacked. This allows for smoother negotiations and fosters a more collaborative approach to resolving differences. Hedging also serves as a way to leave room for interpretation and negotiation in marital conflicts. By using vague or non-committal language, spouses may avoid taking rigid stances, which can be perceived as ultimatums. This is particularly useful when discussing delicate issues such as finances, parenting, or household responsibilities. Meyer (1997) explains that hedging creates a conversational buffer, which helps both partners to approach the issue with flexibility, allowing for more constructive dialogue and mutual compromise.

Marital disputes are often emotionally charged, and direct statements can trigger emotional reactions that may hinder resolution. Hedging provides a means for one partner to raise concerns without overwhelming the other, especially in emotionally vulnerable moments. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness highlights the role of hedging in managing face-threatening acts, which is particularly important in intimate relationships where emotions run high. There may be gender differences in the use of hedging in marriage disputes. Holmes (1995) notes that women

are more likely to use hedging as a way to maintain relationships and avoid direct conflict, whereas men may be more inclined to use assertive or direct language. Understanding these dynamics is essential in marriage counseling, as the communication styles of both partners can influence the resolution process. Marriage disputes are often emotionally charged and involve complex interpersonal dynamics. In such contexts, hedging becomes a valuable strategy for managing disagreement, preserving relationships, and facilitating dialogue. In marriage disputes, hedging functions as a way to express concerns and negotiate solutions without escalating emotional tensions.

Land Disputes

In land disputes, hedging is often used as a discourse strategy to manage conflicts, especially in settings where relationships between disputing parties are important, such as familial or communal contexts. Land disputes can be emotionally and economically charged, and the use of hedging helps to soften the language, allowing the parties involved to express their claims or grievances without creating unnecessary hostility or confrontation. This is particularly important in societies where preserving social harmony and relationships is highly valued.

In land disputes, particularly those involving family members or neighbors, hedging helps to navigate power dynamics and maintain social relationships. According to Wodak (1996), hedging allows speakers to mitigate

the severity of their statements, thereby avoiding direct accusations or confrontations. In many cultures, outright confrontation in such disputes can damage long-standing relationships. Hedging thus serves as a strategy to express claims or disagreements in a manner that reduces the risk of social conflict. Hedging can prevent disputes from escalating into full-blown confrontations. By using non-committal language, such as "maybe," "it seems," or "it could be," parties involved in a land dispute can introduce ambiguity that gives room for negotiation and compromise. Tannen (1993) highlights that the use of hedging in conflict situations softens the force of an argument and allows for a more open-ended discussion. In land disputes, this strategy can de-escalate tensions, especially when the dispute involves multiple stakeholders with differing interests.

In some cases, hedging is used strategically to preserve legal or factual ambiguity, which can benefit one or both parties in a dispute. This is common when the ownership or boundaries of the land in question are unclear or disputed. Hedging allows individuals to present their claims cautiously without fully committing to a particular position, which may weaken their legal standing if proven incorrect. Meyer (1997) explains that hedging can be used in legal discourse to avoid making definitive statements that could later be challenged in court. Hedging plays a crucial role in mediation, where the goal is often to reach a settlement that satisfies all parties involved. In land disputes, mediators may use hedged language to frame

suggestions in a way that leaves room for interpretation and compromise. This encourages the disputing parties to consider alternatives without feeling pressured to accept or reject an offer outright. Fairclough (1989) notes that hedging in negotiation settings creates a less adversarial atmosphere, allowing for more flexible discussions that can lead to mutually agreeable solutions.

In many cultures, particularly in African and Asian contexts, land disputes are deeply intertwined with cultural and familial values. Direct confrontation or aggressive language may be seen as disrespectful and can further entrench the conflict. Hedging, therefore, becomes an important tool for maintaining respect and saving face. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that hedging serves as a politeness strategy, especially in hierarchical or communal societies, where maintaining dignity and respect is essential to conflict resolution.

While hedging can help maintain social harmony, it can also create challenges in reaching a clear legal resolution. The ambiguity introduced by hedging can make it difficult for legal authorities or mediators to ascertain the facts of the case or the precise claims of the parties involved. Wodak (1996) suggests that while hedging serves a social purpose, it may impede the legal process by making it harder to arrive at a definitive conclusion regarding ownership or boundaries.

Land disputes, often involving families, communities, or even legal entities, can be highly contentious and involve complex

legal, cultural, and social implications. In such contexts, hedging allows parties to navigate sensitive issues without inflaming tensions. By using hedging, disputants and mediators can avoid hardening positions and create space for dialogue, negotiation, and resolution.

Dispute Resolution

Hedging as a discourse strategy in both marriage and land disputes highlights the importance of language in conflict resolution. Hedging as a discourse strategy has significant implications for dispute resolution, as it influences the dynamics of communication, the pace of resolution, and the overall effectiveness of negotiations. Whether in personal disputes, such as marriage conflicts, or more formal disagreements, like land disputes, hedging can serve both constructive and problematic roles in managing conflicts (Okoth-Ogendo, 2019). Understanding these implications can help mediators, negotiators, and individuals involved in disputes to use hedging strategically to facilitate positive outcomes. These positive outcomes include:

Facilitating Negotiation and Compromise

Hedging allows disputants to express their concerns, claims, or positions without fully committing to a hard stance. By using phrases like "it seems," "maybe," or "possibly," parties can present their viewpoints in a tentative manner, which can create space for negotiation and compromise. This flexibility is especially important in emotionally charged disputes, where rigid

positions may lead to escalation rather than resolution. As Tannen (1993) notes, hedging can soften the force of an argument and help negotiators frame proposals in ways that are more likely to be accepted by the other party.

Reducing Confrontation

One of the key roles of hedging in dispute resolution is its ability to reduce confrontation by making statements less direct and less threatening. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness emphasizes that hedging is used to mitigate face-threatening acts, thus minimizing the emotional impact of potentially contentious statements. This is particularly useful in personal conflicts, such as marriage disputes, where maintaining relational harmony is a priority. By softening language, hedging allows individuals to express dissatisfaction without provoking defensive reactions, thereby reducing the likelihood of further conflict escalation.

Maintaining Social and Interpersonal Relationships

In disputes where ongoing relationships are important such as family, community, or business settings hedging can help preserve these relationships by reducing the hostility associated with direct language. In land disputes, for instance, where family members or neighbors are involved, hedging helps maintain a level of respect and civility. Wodak (1996) explains that in social contexts where relationships are at stake, hedging serves as a tool for maintaining face and

ensuring that disputes do not irreparably harm interpersonal connections.

Creating Ambiguity and Delaying Resolution

While hedging can facilitate more flexible negotiations, it also has the potential to create ambiguity that may delay resolution. When parties hedge too much, they can obscure their true positions, making it difficult for mediators or negotiators to understand the core issues at stake. Meyer (1997) points out that in legal or formal disputes, hedging can lead to vagueness, which complicates the resolution process by preventing clear and decisive agreements. In land disputes, for instance, excessive hedging may cause confusion regarding property boundaries or ownership, delaying legal or practical resolutions.

Balancing Power Dynamics

In disputes where there are power imbalances, hedging can either help balance or reinforce these dynamics. For less powerful parties, hedging can be a tool to express their viewpoints cautiously without directly challenging authority, thus reducing the risk of retribution or backlash. However, in some cases, hedging may unintentionally reinforce the dominance of the more powerful party by signaling uncertainty or deference. As Holmes (1995) observes, women and other marginalized groups often use hedging to mitigate potential threats in communication, though this may sometimes undermine their authority or the strength of their arguments.

Impact on Mediation Outcomes

Mediators often employ hedging to maintain neutrality and encourage open-ended discussions. Hedging helps mediators avoid taking sides or appearing biased, which is essential for ensuring fairness in the resolution process. Fairclough (1989) argues that hedging in mediation creates a more cooperative atmosphere where both parties feel heard and respected. However, if mediators hedge too much or fail to push for clarity when necessary, it can result in prolonged disputes and ambiguous outcomes. The challenge for mediators is to use hedging strategically without allowing it to obstruct the path to resolution.

Cultural Considerations

Hedging is often culturally embedded, and its effectiveness in dispute resolution can vary depending on cultural norms. In some cultures, indirectness and politeness are highly valued, making hedging an essential part of conflict management. In others, directness and clarity may be preferred, and excessive hedging could be perceived as evasive or dishonest. Brown and Levinson (1987) emphasize that cultural expectations regarding politeness shape how hedging is interpreted. Mediators and negotiators must therefore be culturally aware when using hedging in cross-cultural disputes to ensure that it is appropriately applied. Hedging reflects the human need to balance assertiveness with empathy, ensuring that disputes are handled with care and sensitivity.

Empirical Studies

The empirical studies focusing exclusively on "Hedging as Discourse Strategies in Marriage and Land Dispute in Anambra State" are limited, several scholars have explored related areas that shed light on discourse strategies, including hedging, within marriage and land disputes in Nigerian contexts. Below are five pertinent studies:

Ezeifeka (2019) studied patriarchal legitimization strategies in Igbo gender-related taboos: A case for critical discourse analysis. The study examines how patriarchal ideologies are reinforced through language in Igbo culture. The writer analyzes gender-related taboos and their legitimization strategies, highlighting how discourse practices perpetuate gender inequalities, particularly in contexts like land ownership and marital roles. This work provides insights into the discourse mechanisms, including hedging, that uphold patriarchal norms in Igbo society.

Ojilere (2020) studied gender and politeness/hedging strategies in English among Igbo native speakers in Nigeria: a difference in conversational styles. The study investigates the use of politeness and hedging strategies among Igbo native speakers. The study reveals differences in conversational styles between genders, noting that women tend to employ more hedging devices to maintain politeness and mitigate face-threatening acts. These findings are relevant to understanding communication dynamics in marital interactions within the Igbo community.

Nwoko (2014) examined Hedging: A Linguistic Device of Real-World Situation in Gimba's 'Witnesses to Tears'. The research delves into the use of hedging in literature to reflect real-world communication. By analyzing Gimba's novel, the study illustrates how characters employ hedging as a discourse strategy to navigate complex social situations, which can be extrapolated to understand similar strategies in real-life marital and land dispute contexts.

Ado (2023) investigated The Use of Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions in Shariah-Based Reconciliation Case Proceedings in Nigeria. The study explores the employment of figurative language and idiomatic expressions in Shariah-based reconciliation proceedings, particularly in family and marital disputes. The study highlights how such discourse strategies, including hedging, are utilized to manage conflicts and facilitate amicable resolutions, offering insights applicable to marital disputes in regions like Anambra State.

Dozie et al. (2020) Gender and Politeness/Hedging Strategies in English among Igbo Native Speakers in Nigeria: A Difference in Conversational Styles. This study examines the politeness and hedging strategies in the English language conversations of Igbo native speakers. It finds that both men and women employ hedging as a discourse strategy, with variations influenced by sociolinguistic factors such as age, culture, and hierarchy. These findings contribute to understanding

how hedging functions in communication, including in marital contexts.

Literature Gap

Existing studies on hedging as a discourse strategy have largely focused on its role in politeness strategies, mitigating face-threatening acts, and fostering diplomacy in various communicative contexts, such as political discourse, legal negotiations, and academic writing. However, there remains a significant gap in understanding how hedging functions in resolving interpersonal and communal conflicts, particularly in culturally sensitive disputes like marriage disagreements and land ownership conflicts.

While some research has explored conflict resolution discourse in legal and mediation settings, few studies have specifically examined how hedging is strategically employed by disputants, mediators, or elders to navigate power dynamics, maintain social harmony, and achieve reconciliation in marriage and land disputes. Moreover, existing works tend to focus on Western or urban contexts, leaving a gap in the study of indigenous, rural, and communal conflict resolution practices, particularly in traditional societies such as those in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Additionally, there is limited empirical research on the effectiveness of hedging in these dispute types, particularly regarding whether it leads to long-term resolution or merely delays conflict escalation. Investigating these dimensions can provide a deeper linguistic and sociocultural

understanding of hedging as a conflict management tool. Thus, this study seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing the pragmatic functions of hedging in marriage and land disputes, focusing on how it contributes to negotiation, persuasion, and consensus-building within traditional dispute resolution frameworks in Anambra State.

Methodology

This chapter presents the scientific and analytical framework for the study. This involves the approach and methodology adopted and used for the study. The research design adopted and the processes used in conducting the research are also presented and discussed. It also provides data requirements, forms, and sources. Data collection and analysis tools and instrument used as well as methods for presentation and reporting of findings are presented in this study.

Research Design

This study adopts descriptive research design. Descriptive research design is an independent research that provides professional quantitative research for both the public and private sectors. Descriptive research has strong abilities in terms of performing sophisticated statistical analyses and interpreting their findings within their respective research context.

Area of Study

The use of hedging as a discourse strategy in resolving conflicts, particularly in the contexts of marriage disputes and land

disputes in Achina, Aguata Local Government of Anambra State respectively. Achina is a historic town located in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. It is one of the prominent communities in the southeastern region of Nigeria, known for its rich cultural heritage, strong traditional institutions, and contributions to education and commerce.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of all the resolved land and marriage disputes in Achina. The resolutions was made by: Traditional dispute resolution mechanisms (Council of Elders (Ndi Nze na Ozo), Kindred Heads (Umunna & Igwe-in-Council) 1,090, Religious and community-based mediation (Church Leaders and Pastors & Community-based organizations) 1,331; Legal and governmental approaches (Customary Courts, Magistrate Courts & Anambra State Land & Marriage Laws) 754 and Alternative dispute resolution (Mediation & Arbitration Panels and Conflict Resolution Workshops) 524. The total population of the study is 3699 of resolved land and marriage disputes in Achina. (Record from Aguata Dispute and Allied Matters Commission, 2024).

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Due to the large number of the population, the researcher employed random sampling techniques. The researcher randomly selected 369 resolved land and marriage disputes cases which amounted to 10% of the entire population. And the same number of

questionnaires was distributed to the respondents. During retrieval, it was discovered that 66 copies of the questionnaire were wrongly filled while 53 copies were missing, leaving 250 valid copies. Therefore, 250 questionnaires formed the sample size of the work.

Sources of Data

In this study the researcher collected data from primary and secondary sources. The primary source were through questionnaire. The secondary source of data for this study was basically official documents that are critically relevant to the study including textbooks, journal articles, conference proceedings, periodicals, internet materials, newspaper and magazine publications etc.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were summarized from the responses of the subjects analyzed using mean scores. The data was analyzed using mean rating.

Four point rating scores were assigned numerical values as shown below:

Strongly Agree (SA)/ Very High Extent	4
Agree (A)/ High Extent	3
Disagree (D)/ Low Extent	2
Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Very Low Extent	1

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data for the study were analyzed and presented based on the research questions

that guided the study, statistical means were used to answer all the research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the types of hedging strategies used in managing land dispute discourse?

S/N	ITEMS DESCRIPTION	SA	A	D	SD	NO	X	REMARK
1.	Modal Verbs and Expressions of Probability	40	75	50	0	165	3.3	Agreed
2.	Conditional Statements	60	30	20	10	120	3.2	Agreed
3.	Indirect Speech and Reported Speech	32	60	30	35	157	3.0	Agreed
4.	Diplomatic and Polite Language	40	33	44	18	135	3.2	Agreed
5.	Use of Proverbs and Metaphors	80	50	20	20	190	3.1	Agreed
Grand Mean							3.2	Agreed

Table 1 above shows that items 1,2,3,4 and 5 have the mean scores of 3.3, 3.2, 3.0, 3.2, and 3.1 respectively. The items are above the cut off mean. This shows that the respondents accepted that modal verbs and expressions of probability, conditional statements, indirect speech and reported speech, diplomatic and polite language and use of proverbs and metaphors are the types of hedging strategies used in managing land dispute discourse.

Research Question 2: What are the impact of hedging strategies on conflict resolution?

S/N	ITEMS DESCRIPTION	SA	A	D	SD	NO	X	REMARK
6.	Hedging helps soften direct statements, making conversations less aggressive	40	80	20	20	160	3.0	Agreed
7.	Parties in conflict can express uncertainty or ambiguity, making it easier for others to contribute without fear of confrontation	80	30	60	-	170	3.4	Agreed
8.	Hedging allows individuals to modify their stance slightly, making room for compromise.	60	30	20	10	120	2.9	Agreed
9.	Softening claims through hedging makes arguments appear more balanced and reasonable.	60	42	40	-	142	3.3	Agreed
10.	Hedging helps avoid direct blame or accusations that could damage relationships	20	60	80	10	170	3.4	Agreed
Grand Mean							2.9	Agreed

Table II above shows that items 6,7,8,9, and 10 have mean scores of 3.0, 3.4, 2.9, 3.3, 3.4, respectively. The items are above the cut off mean. This shows that hedging strategies have impact on conflict resolution in Achina.

Research Question 3: What are the cultural and socio-economic factors influencing hedging strategies?

S/N	ITEMS DESCRIPTION	SA	A	D	SD	NO	X	REMARK
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11.	People use indirect language (hedging) to resolve disputes	80	50	20	20	190	3.4	Agreed
12.	Proverbs and idiomatic expressions are commonly used in marriage and land dispute conversations	60	30	20	10	120	2.9	Agreed
13.	Economic status affect the use of hedging in disputes	32	60	30	35	157	3.0	Agreed
14.	Political and legal influence affect hedging in disputes	40	33	44	18	135	3.1	Agreed
15.	People hedge more when they depend financially on the other party in a dispute	40	75	50	0	165	3.3	Agreed
Grand Mean							3.2	Agreed

Table 1 above shows that items 11,12,13,14 and 15 have the mean scores of 3.4, 2.9, 3.0, 3.1, and 3.3 respectively. The items are above the cut off mean. This shows that the respondents accepted that the cultural and socio-economic factors have influence on hedging strategies.

Summary of Findings

From table one, it can be deduced that are there types of hedging strategies used in managing land dispute discourse. This shows that modal verbs and expressions of probability, conditional statements, indirect speech and reported speech, diplomatic and polite language and use of proverbs and metaphors are the types of hedging strategies used in managing land dispute discourse.

Table two above shows that hedging helps soften direct statements, making conversations less aggressive, parties in conflict can express uncertainty or ambiguity, making it easier for others to contribute without fear of confrontation, hedging allows individuals to modify their stance slightly, making room for compromise, softening claims through hedging makes arguments appear more balanced and reasonable and Hedging helps avoid direct blame or accusations that could

damage relationships are the impact of hedging strategies that affect conflict resolution.

Table three above shows that people use indirect language (hedging) to resolve disputes, proverbs and idiomatic expressions are commonly used in marriage and land dispute conversations, economic status affect the use of hedging in disputes, political and legal influence affect hedging in disputes and people hedge more when they depend financially on the other party in a dispute are the cultural and socio-economic factors have influence on hedging strategies.

Conclusion

Hedging is a vital discourse strategy in managing sensitive issues in both marriage and land disputes. It allows individuals to express their viewpoints, manage conflicts, and negotiate resolutions while minimizing the risk of escalation. In marriage disputes, hedging helps to manage emotional sensitivity, preserve relationships, and facilitate more constructive dialogue. Similarly, in land disputes, hedging provides a way for parties to navigate complex power dynamics, express claims cautiously, and avoid direct confrontation, thus creating space for negotiation and compromise. However, while hedging can be beneficial in these disputes, it also introduces ambiguity, which can delay resolution and make it difficult for parties to take clear stances.

Understanding the role of hedging can enhance dispute resolution practices by fostering more constructive and respectful communication. Whether in intimate relationships or broader societal conflicts, hedging is a powerful tool for maintaining harmony and facilitating dialogue.

Overall, hedging is a double-edged sword in dispute resolution, offering both advantages in conflict management and challenges in clarity. Its effective use requires a balance between maintaining flexibility and ensuring that issues are resolved in a timely and definitive manner.

Suggestions for Further Studies

1. To compare hedging strategies used in marriage disputes versus land disputes across different communities in Anambra State or other Nigerian states
2. To explore how men and women employ hedging strategies differently in marriage and land disputes, considering power dynamics, societal expectations, and communication styles
3. To investigate the effectiveness of hedging in achieving conflict resolution in marriage and land disputes

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